

## OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Oedipus: Antigone, my child, tell this blind old man what land we have reached, whose city this is. Who will give some little hospitality this day to the nomad Oedipus? Though I beg but a little, I can live on still less – that will suffice me. I have learned contentment through my sufferings, my long, long time on this earth and my royalty. Child, should you catch sight of some lodging, whether on secular ground or in sacred grove, stop and let me rest – I wish to know where we are. We come as guests to learn of these citizens and to obey their behests.

Antigone: Poor father, the towers wreathing the city seem quite far away. I suspect this is a holy place, abloom as it is with laurel, olive-oil, vines. Within there are a myriad sweet-singing nightingales. Rest yourself on this rough-hewn rock. You have traveled far enough for an old man.

Oedipus: Then sit the blind man down and watch over him.

Antigone: No need for prompting after so long a time together.

Oedipus: Can you tell me where we have come to rest?

Antigone: I am acquainted with Athena, but not this place.

Oedipus: Everyone we met has said the same thing.

Antigone: Shall I ask someone what sort of place this is?

Oedipus: Yes, child, if it's inhabited.

Antigone: People dwell here. But I need not stir – there is a man approaching.

Oedipus: He's coming to us?

Antigone: He's here, so say what you think fit.

Oedipus: Stranger, listen to this lady (she is my eyes as well as her own). She tells me you have made a timely appearance to enlighten us.

Stranger: Before you ask any further, leave your resting-place. You must not tread on holy ground.

Oedipus: What ground is it? Which god does it honour?

Stranger: No-one may touch it or inhabit it. It belongs to those dread goddesses, the daughters of Earth and Darkness.

Oedipus: By what holy name should I address them?

Stranger: The people hereabouts would say the all-seeing Eumenides, though elsewhere other names are preferred.

Oedipus: May they welcome their suppliant with kindness, for I shall never leave this place.

Stranger: What is this?

Oedipus: It is a sign of my destiny.

Stranger: I would not presume to exile you from the city until I have announced your actions to the inhabitants.

Oedipus: For God's sake, do this wanderer the courtesy of answering his questions.

Stranger: Speak – I shan't slight you.

Oedipus: What land have we come to?

Stranger: Heed me and you will know all I myself know. The whole area is sacred. It is the domain of holy Poseidon, and the Titan Prometheus, the bringer of fire. The spot you

tread upon here is known as the Bronze Path, Athens' foundation. The neighbouring fields boast that the equestrian Kolonus was their founder and everyone carries his name. Such a history, sir, is less revered in story than in our everyday lives.

Oedipus: This place is inhabited, then?

Stranger: Indeed, and the citizens bear the god's name.

Oedipus: Who rules them? Or do they rule themselves?

Stranger: Their king is their sole ruler.

Oedipus: Who is this man who rules by law and might?

Stranger: He's called Theseus, son of Aegeus.

Oedipus: Can you send a messenger to him?

Stranger: To report to him or to arrange a meeting?

Oedipus: To say that by lending a modicum of aid he may gain much.

Stranger: What advantages could one expect from a blind man?

Oedipus: My words shall not be sightless.

Stranger: Sir, you will come to no harm now. You are well-born, it's clear, though luckless. Remain here, where you first caught my eye, while I tell all to the people out there (not the urban dwellers). It is they, after all, who will decide if you are to remain or go back.

Oedipus: Has he gone, child?

Antigone: He has, father. You may speak your mind confidentially – there's no-one here but me.

Oedipus: Fearsome goddesses, since it is to your precinct I have first come to rest, abuse neither me nor Phoebus – while he forecast the great misfortunes I have suffered, he told me of the repose I would eventually find when I reached my final destination – the sanctuary of the Holy Ones where I would be given lodging. My wretched life would change and those who took me in would be blessed with riches and those who drove me out would be punished. Tokens of these things would be given – earthquakes or thunder or Zeus-fire. It is clear now that it is under your steadfast protection that I was brought on this road and to this grove. Without you I would never have found you so soon, a sober traveler amid clear-headed deities, never have come to sit on this ragged rock. Goddesses, heed Apollo's oracle and grant me an easeful end to my life, unless I appear unworthy, for now I groan under life's heaviest burdens. Hither, ancient Darkness's sweet offspring, hither, mighty Pallas' most glorious city, Athens, have pity on this wretched spectre of what was once the aged frame of Oedipus.

Antigone: Sh! Here come some aged men, guardians of the place where you sit.

Oedipus: I will hush. Hide me here in the grove, so I may hear their words.

Chorus: Look! Who was here? Where's he live? Where's that most impious of all men, that stranger? Look around, make every effort to find him. He's an itinerant old man, no local. Otherwise he would not venture into the sacred grove of the powerful maidens. WE tremble to speak their name, we slink by and avert our eyes, sending up a silent prayer. Word has it some profane man was here, but in this entire sanctuary I cannot find his whereabouts.

Oedipus: Hare I am. For the sound of words serves as my sight.

Chorus: Alas! A dread sight, a dread sound.!

Oedipus: I beg you, don't consider me a profane man.

Chorus: Protector Zeus, who is this man?

Oedipus: You can scarcely call me fortunate, o guardians of this land. My appearance is proof of that, or I would not have got here by means of another's eyes, all my bulk supported by a frail girl.

Chorus: You have no eyes. Is this a lifetime affliction? You have lived long, I can tell. Well, you will not suffer under this curse too, if I can help it. You have come too far, too far. Ill-fated sir, see you don't trespass where the bowl of refreshing water is poured into the stream, retire, quit this place. Don't come any nearer. Do you hear, you poor benighted wanderer? If you would speak at our assembly, leave this consecrated ground and make your address where it is lawful. Go hence.

Oedipus: Daughter, what shall we do for the best?

Antigone: Father, we must do as the citizens do. We must submit and listen to reason.

Oedipus: Give me your hand.

Antigone: Here it is.

Oedipus: Strangers, we will heed your words and depart. I would not incur your wrath.

Chorus: Old man, no-one will wrest you from this place against your will.

Oedipus: Yet further?

Antigone: Yes, further.

Oedipus: Still more?

Chorus: Go on, girl – you understand.

Antigone: Come with me, feel your blind way whither I lead.

Chorus: You are a stranger in a strange land. Take heart. Revile what the city has taught us is bad, revere what it holds good.

Oedipus: Lead me, child, to a place where we may go the way of integrity, where we may converse without struggling against necessity.

Chorus: Here we are. Never stir beyond this rocky seat.

Oedipus: Do you mean this?

Chorus: You heard me – no further.

Oedipus: May I sit?

Chorus: Close by is a jutting ledge on top of the rock.

Antigone: Let me show you, father. Match me step for step. Slowly now.

Oedipus: Oh!

Antigone: Lean your own body on my arm. Trust in my love for you.

Oedipus: What a life of misfortune I lead!

Chorus: Poor man! Now you have gained your composure, tell me your history. Who is this long-suffering girl who leads you? May we know your native land?

Oedipus: Sirs, I am banished from my native land. Don't...

Chorus: What are you saying, old man?

Oedipus: Don't ask me who I am, don't, don't. Question me no further.

Chorus: Why?

Oedipus: My early days were dreadful.

Chorus: Tell us!

Oedipus: Child, why was I born?

Chorus: What is your parentage, sir? Tell us, who was your father?

Oedipus: Child, how I have suffered!

Antigone: Tell them. You are nearing your life's end.

Oedipus: I shall. I have no reason to refuse.

Chorus: You've prevaricated too long. Quick, tell us.

Oedipus: Do you know any of Laius' progeny?

Chorus: Oh no...

Oedipus: The house of Labdakos?

Chorus: God!

Oedipus: Of wretched Oedipus?

Chorus: You...are he??

Oedipus: Don't tremble at my words.

Chorus: OHH! Oedipus: I am ill-fated.

Chorus: Ohh!

Oedipus: Daughter, what will they do?

Chorus: Leave this land.

Oedipus: What about your promise? Is it a promise no longer?

Chorus: No-one may be punished who imposes atonement for a slight. A trick for a trick brings pain, not joy, and ends in repayment. Leave this place, now, quit this land immediately. Bring no more harm to our city.

Antigone: Merciful sirs, you have heard about my aged father's unwitting deeds and now you will not suffer his presence here. But I beg you, sirs, have pity! I am pleading, holding your eyes with my own, which serve for his, as might one of your own daughters beg for some respect for her poor father. Our fate lies in you – as though you were gods. Come, assent, allow us a joy we never looked for. I appeal to you by what is dear to you – a child, a spouse, possessions, your gods. With God as his guide no mortal may escape his fate.

Chorus: Child of Oedipus, we pity you both in your misfortune, but in fear of the gods we may say no more than what we have already said.

Oedipus: Then of what value is fame and good repute? It leads nowhere, yet they say Athens is the most pious of cities, the only one that can rescue and succour a wronged stranger. What help is there for me? You are casting me out of this sanctuary, afraid of my very name. Not my physical presence, not my deeds, no! What I have suffered exceeds what I have done – think of my father and mother. They are why you fear me. All this I know well. How, though, could I be evil by nature if I have paid wrong with wrong?

Even if I had acted wittingly, I would not have been considered evil. I went my way in ignorance, but those through whom I suffered and was destroyed were far from ignorant. Therefore I beg you, strangers, by the gods, reinstate me, save me, don't dishonour the gods, give them their due. The gods look down on the godly and ungodly alike, but there is no escape for the wicked. With them on your side do not serve holy Athens by engulfing her in deeds of impiety. You may trust the suppliant you have taken in – defend him, protect him. Do not despise me for my ill-favoured countenance. I am here as a holy and a righteous man – I bring favour to your citizens. When your lord comes, whoever he is, you shall know all. Meanwhile commit no sin.

Chorus: Old man, there is great reason to respect your words, but the rulers of the land must be the final arbiters.

Oedipus: And where, gentlemen, is the man who governs this land?

Chorus: He is in the nation's capital. The guard who sent me here has gone to fetch him.

Oedipus: Will he respect this blind man, do you think? Will he have concern for us? Enough to meet me face to face?

Chorus: Of course, when he recognizes your name.

Oedipus: Who will tell him your news of me?

Chorus: It's a long road. Travellers love to talk. When he hears the stories, he will be here, rest assured. Old man, your name is on everyone's lips – even if he is at leisure, hearing of you will bring him here in no time.

Oedipus: May his arrival bring happiness to his city and to me. What good man is not his own best friend?

Antigone: Zeus, what am I to say? How shall I make sense of this, father?

Oedipus: My child - Antigone – what is it?

Antigone: A woman is approaching, seated on an Aitnaian foal. A Thessalian bonnet on her head protects her from the sun. What shall I say to her? Is it...? Surely not! Are my wits wandering? It is...it isn't. I don't know what to say. It IS the poor dear, no other. She's beaming as she comes, she's gesturing to me. It's clear it's my own sweet Ismene.

Oedipus: What, child?

Antigone: It is your daughter, my own sister. You will hear her voice any second now.

Ismene: Oh, doubly sweet – my father's voice and my sister's. With great difficulty I found you and now, through my tears, it is with great difficulty that I see you.

Oedipus: Child, have you really come?

Ismene: Oh father, what a pitiable sight!

Oedipus: You are here, child?

Ismene: After much hardship, but yes, I am here.

Oedipus: Touch me, child!

Ismene: Both of you at once!

Oedipus: My offspring!

Ismene: What a wretched life this is!

Oedipus: Here? Mine?

Ismene: Hers, yours, my own!

Oedipus: Child, why have you come?

Ismene: To look after you, father.

Oedipus: Have you missed me?

Ismene: I have, and I must speak to you, so here I am with my one trustworthy servant.

Oedipus: Your young brothers? Could they not toil on your behalf?

Ismene: They are where they are. Distress dogs them at present.

Oedipus: Oh, they live like Egyptians, they do things the Egyptian way. In Egypt the men stay at home and embroider – it's the women who bring in the wages. Always. So, my children, while they, who should be looking after my affairs, languish in the house like girls, you labour on my behalf, poor wretch that I am. Antigone, ever since childhood, once she matured, was constantly at my side, poor girl, wandering, guiding her aged father, trekking the wild woods, whether drenched with rain or burnt by the sun's rays, she endured, eschewing a domestic life that her father may have sustenance. You too, Ismene my child, once came and told me of all the oracles which had been proclaimed about me, evading the descendants of Kadmos. A faithful guardian were you to me, after my exile. Ismene, what news have you for your father? What message has brought you from home? It's not for nothing you've come, that I know for sure. Some new terror for me?

Ismene: Father, I shall omit the difficulties I have gone through in seeking your whereabouts. I have no wish to suffer twice in telling them again. I have come to tell you of the troubles which now plague your two wretched sons. In former days, they, and Kreon too, were anxious that the dominion should stay in Kreon's hands so as to avoid any pollution, staining the city- -for they thought of the family curse which hangs over the doomed house. But now, through some deity or their own wicked hearts, foul strife has taken hold of those triply-wretched men – they wish to take control and have supreme power. The younger-born has deprived the elder of the throne and exiled him. Spreading rumour reached us that he, exiled from the valley city of Argos, has taken up a new alliance and mustered an army, determined that Argos wrest power from the Kadmeian plain or reach celestial glory. Father, this is no mere show of words – it's the naked truth. I cannot, however, tell if the gods will pity your plight.

Oedipus: Had you hope that the gods would offer their concern and redeem me?

Ismene: I have faith in oracles, father.

Oedipus: What oracles? Daughter, what has been prophesied?

Ismene: The welfare of the citizens depends on their keeping you to themselves in both life and death.

Oedipus: Who could benefit from such as me?

Ismene: They say their authority lies in you.

Oedipus: I am as good as dead – how can they consider me a man?

Ismene: They do! Now the gods exalt you – they who once led you to ruin.

Oedipus: Exalt a poor old man – destroy a young one.

Ismene: Kreon will be here, therefore, very soon.

Oedipus: What will he do, daughter? Enlighten me.

Ismene: He wants to establish you near the land of Kadmos. The citizens then can control you, though you will not be allowed inside their borders.

Oedipus: What profit will I have if I dwell beyond Thebes?

Ismene: If your obsequies were ill-omened, they would pay the price.

Oedipus: It needs no god to tell us this.

Ismene: Therefore they want to place you close to the land and to deprive you of self-sufficiency.

Oedipus: Will they inter me in Theban soil?

Ismene: Father, your kindred's blood-curse forbids it.

Oedipus: Then they will never get control of me.

Ismene: That's heavy news for the Thebans.

Oedipus: How exactly do you mean?

Ismene: They fear your anger when they stand at your graveside.

Oedipus: Child, from whom did you learn this?

Ismene: From the ambassadors who brought the news from the Delphic altar.

Oedipus: Apollo foretold that about me?

Ismene: So says the embassy from Thebes.

Oedipus: Did either of my sons hear this?

Ismene: Both of them – they understood the context well.

Oedipus: Those villains! So this news instilled in them the love of supreme command over concern for my desires?

Ismene: I mourn the news, but I must bear the consequences.

Oedipus: May the gods do nothing to extinguish the strife that has been ordained. This is the outcome I crave for the battle they have taken up: he who holds sway will not remain in power, and he who was exiled will not come back again. They did nothing to prevent their father from being ousted, dishonourable wretches, they left him to flounder. No, he was ejected, pronounced an exile. You may say that I wanted this and that the city was right to approve it. Not so! That day, as my heart seethed with rage, I craved death, death by stoning, but no-one came forward to grant my desire. But in time, when all my troubles seemed less severe, and I realized that my passion chastised me too heavily for my past transgressions, then, and only then, the city forced my expulsion, and THEY, who were in a position to help their father, would do nothing, and for want of one little word, I was left to wander endlessly, a poor beggar. But it is from these two girls that I have received all that they can give – food, safe conduct, a daughter's kind assistance. But THEY – they chose to assume the power and command that should have gone to the man who sired them. They will not find an ally in me nor any joy in ruling Thebes. This I know now that I have heard the prophecies Ismene speaks of and consider those ancient oracles about me which Phoibos brought to fruition.

Furthermore, let them send Kreon to check me over – or indeed any other statesman of note. If you wish to protect me with the aid of the holy goddesses who guard the city, pray that the city acquire a mighty saviour and my enemies a pack of troubles.

Chorus: Oedipus, you deserve our pity, you and your daughters here. But since by your words you have offered yourself as the city's saviour, I would advise you of the possible consequences.

Oedipus: Dearest friend, be my patron. I will follow your advice to the letter.

Chorus: Now make atonement to those deities on whose grounds you trod when first you arrived here.

Oedipus: How? Tell me, friends.

Chorus: Bring holy libations from the ever-flowing stream; make sure the hands which touch it are spotless.

Oedipus: And when I have the holy water...?

Chorus: There are there some mixing-bowls, the work of a fine craftsman. Garland them about the necks and both handles.

Oedipus: With foliage? With thread? What?

Chorus: With the fleece of a new-shorn lamb.

Oedipus: And then? How do I end the rite?

Chorus: Face first light and pour the libation.

Oedipus: I am to use the pitchers you mention?

Chorus: Three times, yes, and the last one you must pour out entirely.

Oedipus: What do I fill that one with? Tell me.

Chorus: Water and honey. No wine.

Oedipus: And when the dark-leaved earth has received it...?

Chorus: Place thereon twenty-seven olive-branches, carried in both hands, and repeat these prayers.

Oedipus: Those I would love to hear. They are most important.

Chorus: We call those deities The Kindly Ones; therefore you, or some representative, must entreat them to receive you with kindly hearts and protect you. Speak softly, do not

raise your voice. Then leave and keep your back to them. If you do this I will stand by you with all confidence; if you do not, stranger, I have little hope for you.

Oedipus: Child, do you hear these Kolonian strangers?

Antigone: I hear them. Do as they say.

Oedipus: I cannot. I am hobbled by two evils, helplessness and sightlessness. One of you must perform this rite. One soul, if compassionate, may do the work of thousands. Act quickly but don't abandon me. Left alone, with no-one to guide me, I would be useless.

Ismene: I will do it. But where shall I find the place?

Chorus: Through that wood there, stranger. If you need anything, a local resident will tell you.

Ismene: I am on my way. Antigone, stay here and look after our father. Children, even in distress, must be mindful of the distress of their parents.

Chorus: It is a dreadful thing to rekindle an old tragedy, yet I must know...

Oedipus: What?

Chorus: The cause of your debilitating distress.

Oedipus: For friendship's sake, don't reopen deep wounds.

Chorus: Stranger, I would hear a true report. Leave out nothing.

Oedipus: Alas!

Chorus: Be content, I beg you.

Oedipus: Alas!

Chorus: Trust me. And I will satisfy your requests.

Oedipus: Stranger, I have undergone dreadful things. All unwillingly, as God may attest, none of my choosing.

Chorus: And the result?

Oedipus: The city bound me to a bed of shame, a marriage of ruin, and I was ignorant of the fact.

Chorus: Is it as I hear – that the fateful coupling was with your own mother?

Oedipus: A deadly blow, stranger, are your words. And from my loins sprang...

Chorus: Yes?

Oedipus: Two children, two tokens of my guilt.

Chorus: Oh Zeus!

Oedipus: Two products of my queen's birth-pangs.

Chorus: So they are both your daughters and...

Oedipus: My sisters too, yes.

Chorus: Alas!

Oedipus: Countless woe in constant flux.

Chorus: You have suffered.

Oedipus: Unbearably.

Chorus: You did wrong.

Oedipus: No wrong.

Chorus: No?

Oedipus: I received the city's gift – my spouse – would I had not – it caused me endless grief.

Chorus: Why, poor wretch? You caused the death...

Oedipus: What now? What do you wish to know?

Chorus: ...of your father?



Oedipus: God, another blow!

Chorus: Yes?

Oedipus: Yes. But there is something...

Chorus: Yes?

Oedipus: ...that smacks here of justice.

Chorus: How?

Oedipus: I shall tell you. I did not know the man I killed, and I myself was his prey. I am innocent by law – I did this in ignorance.

Chorus: Here comes King Theseus, Aegeus' son; he has heard news of you.

Theseus: Son of Laios, I have heard much of you – how, a long time past, your eyes were bloodily gouged out. I knew you already and when I heard the news as I traveled here, I recognized you all the more. Your clothing, your wretched appearance mark you for who you are. In all pity I must ask you, ill-fated Oedipus, what you want from the city and from me, you and your poor companion. Tell me. It would be dreadful to walk away from the plight you tell of. I, like you, was brought up in exile, alone, fighting my demons in a foreign land, incapable of turning my back on another exile in distress, such as yourself. As I am a man I am aware that I have no more claim on tomorrow's fortune than you have.

Oedipus: Theseus, your noble nature is revealed in those few words; therefore I do not hesitate to answer you equally briefly. You have revealed my status, parentage, native land. It remains for me to tell you what I want, then I am done.

Theseus: Tell me. I wish to know.

Oedipus: I come to offer you my wretched carcass – not a pretty sight yet of more benefit than a handsome physique.

Theseus: What benefit could you bring to this place?

Oedipus: That you will learn in time, not now.

Theseus: When will this gift be manifested?

Oedipus: When I die and you become my sexton.

Theseus: You are making a request for burial at life's end, but what of your life now? Do you forget yourself? Or do you not care?

Oedipus: At my death everything will be dealt with satisfactorily.

Theseus: The favour you ask is a small one.

Oedipus: See to it, though. The contest at least is not small.

Theseus: The one between your sons and myself, you mean?

Oedipus: Yes, they'll wish to convey me to Thebes.

Theseus: If that is their wish, you must not flee them.

Oedipus: They were never there when I needed them.

Theseus: Anger in adversity is inappropriate, foolish man.

Oedipus: When you learn of me, THEN chastise me. For now leave well alone.

Theseus: Then tell me. I may not speak without knowledge.

Oedipus: Sorrow on painful sorrow have I undergone, Theseus.

Theseus: Tell me of your house's ancient curse.

Oedipus: No. Every Greek repeats this tale.

Theseus: What suffering beyond that of most men have you endured?

Oedipus: Thus it is: I was banished from my own country by my own sons. Nor may I ever return because I slew my father.

Theseus: Why, then, would they send for you if you are condemned to exile?

Oedipus: A divine oracle is forcing their hand.

Theseus: What dire consequences do they fear from this prophecy?

Oedipus: Punishment in this land.

Theseus: How should there be hostility between this nation and yours?

Oedipus: Dearest child of Aegeus, the gods alone are granted immortality – everything else is confounded by mighty Time. A land's power fades, a body's likewise, faith dies, its opposite flourishes, and favour never prevails consistently among friends or from city to city. Sweetness turns to bitterness and back again – some experience this today, others will know it tomorrow. If in Thebes you thrive today, endless Time engenders days and nights, knowing which light and harmony may be routed with one little word. Then my cold corpse, secret and at rest, shall drink their hot blood – if Zeus and his offspring Phoibos are true gods! But, since idle words are useless, let me continue as I began – only keep your pledge. Unless the gods deceive me, you need never say that Oedipus was a worthless addition to your city.

Chorus: Lord, earlier this man said such words as these right here and swore they would be fulfilled.

Theseus: Who would spurn the goodwill of such a man, who from the first merited our constant hospitality? In addition, he came as a suppliant of the deities of this city and of me and pays us no mean tribute. Honoured as I am I will never withhold my thanks to him and shall settle him here as a fellow-citizen.

If the stranger decides to stay, you may protect him, or he may come with me. Oedipus, I give you your choice and will abide by your decision.

Oedipus: Zeus, such men as these deserve your goodness.

Theseus: What is your will? Shall you dwell in my house?

Oedipus: If the law allows it, yes. But this is the land...

Theseus: What plans do you have here? I'll not stand in your way.

Oedipus: ...where I shall have mastery over those who exiled me.

Theseus: Your settling here is, you might say, a great blessing for us.

Oedipus: If your words hold true, certainly.

Theseus: You can rely on me. Heaven forbid I should let you down.

Oedipus: I shall not insist on your oath of honour.

Theseus: You will need nothing beyond my word, I assure you.

Oedipus: What are you going to do? Theseus: What in particular are you afraid of?

Oedipus: Men will take me... Theseus: My guards will take care of them.

Oedipus: See me safe before you depart. Theseus: Don't tell me my duty.

Oedipus: You cannot blame my dread. Theseus: There is no fear in MY heart.

Oedipus: You are unaware of their threats. Theseus: No man will remove you against my will. Many threats are used in anger, but in the presence of a sovereign intellect, threats vanish. If those men were so bold as to threaten to make you away, be assured that they will have a long and impossible voyage. Be of good cheer! My feelings aside, remember that it was Apollo who sent you here. Still, even in my absence my very name will keep you from harm.

Chorus: Friend, welcome to Colonus, shining land of valiant steeds,

Where sings the sweet-voiced nightingale among the dusky reeds,

Where holy groves abound with fruit, where wine-dark ivy grows,

Where with his faithful acolytes wine-maddened Bacchus goes.

Here, gloriously beclustered, the narcissus burgeons free,  
God's age-old wreath. Here, too, the golden crocus you may see.  
The springs of fertile Kephisos, all-watchful, spread and swell.  
The Muses and gold-bridled Aphrodite love her well.

Such wonders Asia cannot boast – King Pelops does not know,  
In his domains, the dark-green olive, fearful of no foe.  
But here she prospers, totally resistant, dying never;  
While Zeus and grey-eyed Pallas guard her close, protectors ever.

Queen of the Sea, of horses, foals, Poseidon, Zeus, all three,  
May also boast that here a gift was given to the sea –  
The oar, the Nereids' nemesis - Kolonus gave it birth.  
The bridle, too, which mastered the first horses of the earth.

Antigone: O land heaped with praise, now must you show these words shining in action.

Oedipus: What is this, child? Antigone: Father, here comes Kreon, attended by his retinue.

Oedipus: Beloved elders, you shall put the final touches to my salvation.

Chorus: Courage! We shall indeed. Though I am old, this country's power is still vigorous.

Kreon: Noble countrymen, fresh fear at my approach shows in your eyes. Tremble not, nor cast abuse on me. I have not come equipped for action (I am an old man!) but I know that here before us is the most powerful city in Greece. I am sent, old as I am, to persuade this man to settle in the land of Kadmos – sent not by a single individual but the entire community, since, as kin to him, I, more than any other citizen, have suffered for his misfortunes.

Poor, wretched Oedipus, hear me and approach my domain. All Kadmos' people are right to invite you, myself above all, since, unless I am the most hateful man alive, I share your pain, old man. I see your wretchedness, your outcast state, endlessly wandering, bereft of livelihood, tended by a single companion (I can scarcely believe she could have been reduced to such circumstances as she now suffers, always caring for you in this beggar's life – and at such an age, without the joys of wedlock, vulnerable to any man's approach). A grievous shame was cast on you, on me, on our whole family. It is not possible to suppress what is as clear as day, but, Oedipus; in the name of our household gods, listen to me and put it behind you. You have agreed to settle in my city and live at my palace, so bid farewell to this city, that is best. But you should have more reverence for your new home since long ago she nurtured you.

Oedipus: You arrogant man! The tricks you play, wrapped in the semblance of justice! Why are you doing this? Why do you wish to capture me again and cause me such excessive pain? In days gone by when I was so sick with my own sufferings that I would dearly have loved to exit this earth, you were in no mood to treat me with kindness, but when I had had my fill of anger and was beginning to enjoy my home life, THEN you kicked me out, exiled me. Our kinship meant nothing to you then. Now, once more, you see the kind welcome made to me by this city and your whole clan and you do an

about-face, cloaking cruel words in soothing tones. What joy can there be in receiving unwanted hospitality? Imagine someone denying you help in your need, but when your wishes have been fulfilled, then he obliges you – a favour which is not a favour at all! You would think this boon was worthless, would you not? That's how you are treating me – decent in word, sinful in deed. I intend to declare right here how I may expose you as a villain. You come here not to take me to your domain – no, you plan to settle me beyond the border that your city may be free from harm, not alienated from Athens. That will not happen. THIS will – my vengeance will remain here forever, and my sons will acquire just so large a portion of my native land as they need to perish there.

Surely I have a greater understanding of the Theban mind than you. Of course, since I heed those who are even wiser, Apollo and his father, Zeus Himself! You come here with your lying, wounding words. All this talk will get you more trouble than ease. My own words have not won you, so go! Let us settle here. It will not be a bad life as long as we gain some cheer.

Kreon: Do you think I suffer in your plight more than you do yourself?

Oedipus: I will take great delight in the inability of your words to sway either me or my friends here.

Kreon: Wretch, you have not acquired wisdom over time, have you? You are a disgrace even in your dotage.

Oedipus: You have a clever tongue! I know of no just man who can argue well on all occasions.

Kreon: There's a difference between a speech of great volubility and one of significance.

Oedipus: Your words are brief and to the point, are they??

Kreon: Not according to you, it seems.

Oedipus: Leave! I speak for these men too – dismiss your guard, don't turn them against me here where I am to dwell.

Kreon: I call these men to witness, not you, calling to mind your answer to your friends, if ever I arrest you...

Oedipus: YOU have allies here, do you, who will take me by force?

Kreon: You will still pay for your arrogance.

Oedipus: With what action will you back up your threats?

Creon: Just now I have called for the arrest of one of your daughters, and soon I will make off with the other.

Oedipus: O God! Kreon: Yes, soon you will have more grief to bemoan,

Oedipus: You have my child? Kreon: And will soon have the other.

Oedipus: Strangers, what will you do? Betray me? Or banish this blasphemous man?

Chorus: Stranger, leave! Quick! Your past and present deeds are impious.

Kreon: Willing or not, the time has come to seize her.

Antigone: I'm lost. Where to go? What support do I have, mortal or immortal?

Chorus: Stranger, what are you doing?

Kreon: I'll leave him alone but I will take HER. She is mine.

Oedipus: Protectors of the land... Chorus: Sir, you are unjust. Kreon: Not so.

Chorus: How not? Kreon: They are mine to take.

Oedipus: Alas, poor city!

Chorus: Sir, what are you doing? Let go. Before long you and I will measure our strength in combat.

Kreon: Stop! Chorus: I will not. The fault lies in you.

Creon: If you cause me grief, then you are waging war on the city.

Oedipus: As I said. Chorus: Take your hands off the girl. Creon: Don't demand what you can't enforce.

Chorus: Let me go, I say. Kreon: And I tell YOU to leave.

Chorus: Help, come here, neighbours. The city, MY city, is being destroyed. Help!

Antigone: They are dragging me away, friends. O God!

Oedipus: Child, where are you? Antigone: They are abducting me.

Oedipus: Give me your hands, daughter. Antigone: I can't!

Kreon: Take her! Oedipus: O no, God no!

Kreon: You'll travel without these two staffs from now on. Should you wish to attack your city and my friends under whose command I act, though their ruler, go ahead! Time will reveal to you, I'm sure, that you are doing yourselves no favours, as in the past, by gratifying your anger against your friends. Your anger has ever tarnished you.

Chorus: Stop this, sir. Kreon; Don't touch me, I say.

Chorus: I'll not let you go. You have taken those girls.

Creon: You will soon provide the city with even more booty – I will lay hands on more than them.

Chorus: What next? Kreon: I'll take HIM.

Chorus: Sacrilege! Kreon: It's as good as done.

Chorus?: The land's ruler will stop you.

Oedipus: You foul creature! Kreon: You will lay hands on me?

Kreon: Shut up! Oedipus: May our goddesses no longer silence my prayer! Wretch, who've deprived me of her who has been my very eyes by taking her away. May the all-seeing sun confer on you and yours such a life and such an old age as mine.

Kreon: Do you see that, neighbours?

Oedipus: They see us both, and they are aware of the tribulations I have suffered on account of their deeds. From your words, they know also, I am immune.

Kreon: I will not curb your anger. Sooner or later I shall take him, even if I must do it alone.

Oedipus: O God!

Chorus: Sir, you are most arrogant if you think that you can do this.

Kreon: I can. Chorus: Then I will no longer have respect for this city.

Kreon: In a just cause the underdog will vanquish the mighty.

Oedipus: You hear what he's saying? Chorus: He won't do it!

Kreon: That is for Zeus to know, not you.

Chorus: Such presumption! Kreon: Presumption, perhaps, but you will put up with it.

Chorus: People! Elders! Quick, come here! This is outrageous!

Theseus: What is this noise? What is the matter? What terror has caused you to interrupt my rite of sacrifice to the sea-god who protects our Kolonus? Tell me – I must know all. Why have I been forced to scurry here somewhat more swiftly than I would have liked?

Oedipus: Dearest friend (I know you by your voice), this man has been the source of new and terrible pain for me.

Theseus: What kind of pain? Who inflicted it? Tell me.

Oedipus: Kreon here is taking my only daughters away from me.

Theseus: What? Oedipus: Now you know my misery.

Theseus: One of you, go to the sacrificial altars. Tell them there to leave their rites and go full-tilt, on horse and foot, to where the road branches. Save the girls from abduction, otherwise I am a beaten man, a laughing-stock to this stranger. Quick! Obey me! If I deal with him in anger, justified as it is, I'll not let him off lightly. The laws I established, no others, shall control him. You'll not leave this place till you've brought them before me. Your deeds are not worthy of you, nor of me nor this land! You come to a city which practices justice and good government, and demolish its supreme authority. You take what you please, and that by violence. You think my city is devoid of citizens, a slave-state, perchance? You think I am a nobody?

Thebes cannot have produced such a villain as you. She is not in the habit of raising criminals, and would disapprove of you if she knew that you have robbed me and my gods, fallen on helpless suppliants. Had I journeyed to your land, even if I had every right in the world, I would never have appropriated anything without the permission of whoever ruled there. I have always known how a stranger should behave in a strange land. But you discredit even your own city as though it had no worth; the fullness of time has left you not only aged but witless too.

So, I say again, as I said before, someone bring those girls here NOW! Unless, of course, you want alien status. That can be arranged! I say it and I mean it!

Chorus: You see what you have been brought to, stranger? While appearing just, you are condemned as a criminal.

Kreon: Aegeus' son, the city I rule was neither empty nor thoughtless when I acted as I did, whatever YOU say. I never imagined that anyone would so admire my kindred as to espouse his cause in my despite. I never thought they would take in an impious parricide, a man who is one-half of an incestuous marriage. I was aware that this hill of Ares, an essential part of the city, would never allow vagrants to settle here. Trusting in this belief, I overcame him and claimed my prize. I would not have acted so if he had not rained down vicious curses on me and my kin. Such actions justify my retaliation. Old age has no truck with anger, only death. And the dead feel nothing.

Do as you wish! My isolation renders me powerless, just though my cause remains. Yet despite this, weak as I am, I will make an attempt at retaliation.

Oedipus: Vile, arrogant man, is your insolence aimed at this old man before you or yourself? You talk of murders and marriages, you batter me with words, words I had to endure. It was the god's will, the result of a timeless anger against our house. For you will discover no shameful offence that I have committed against either myself or my kin. So tell me – if it was preordained that my father should die at the hands of his own child, how can you justly revile me now? Me, who at the time was not even a branch on my family tree, no father, no mother, unborn! If in my manifest wretchedness I attacked and killed my father, knowing neither deed nor victim, how can you in all fairness condemn me for an unwitting act? You insolent man, you are shameless in making me speak of my marriage to my mother (she's your SISTER, for God's sake!). No, I'll not be silent, not now you have spoken such a stream of filth. Yes, she bore me (o the grief!), but we were both unwitting. She bore me AND to my shame she bore children OF me. But this I know – with full knowledge of the facts you defame us both. The wedding would have been against my will, just as is my telling of it. But I will be exonerated from this marriage and

from the parricide which you are constantly bringing up in your attempt to slander me. Answer me one thing at least. If someone had tried to kill you here and now, would you try to ascertain if he were your father, or would you take instant revenge? I suspect that, if you cherish life, you would have vengeance on your assailant, not look into legal niceties. Such a situation was I in (the gods willed it). My father himself, were he alive, would not gainsay me. But you, an unjust man who thinks it acceptable to speak of anything you like, utterable or unutterable, make these vicious accusations in front of these people. You think fit to flatter Theseus for his great success in founding the city of Athens, but in your praise you forget one thing – that if any land can truly honour and respect the gods, this one is superior to Thebes. Yes, Athens, whence you have wrested both myself, an old man and a suppliant, and my daughters. And therefore I call upon these goddesses, I entreat them and assail them with prayers to be our allies, to show you what sort of protectors this city has.

Chorus: Lord, this stranger is a man of great worth. His sufferings are monstrous – they deserve to be requited.

Theseus: Enough! While there are people already in action, we stand idly by.

Kreon: How can a feeble man like me obey your commands?

Theseus: Set off down the road there. Be my escort. If you have hidden the girls around here, you can reveal them to us. If their guards have got far away, it is no longer our concern. Others are already giving chase – they'll never be able to thank the gods for their escape. Lead the way. Your luck has turned – the hunter is now the captive. Yes, you cannot protect gains got by deception. You have no-one else to help you. I know you did not seek to perform such an outrage without preparation. No, there must have been someone you trusted to aid you. I must see to it that this city does not kow-tow to one man. Do you honestly think I said any of this lightly? That I am without resources?

Kreon: I have no quarrel with what you say. At home I shall know my duty.

Theseus: Threaten away! Oedipus, stay with us – you will be left in peace. Rest assured, unless I predecease you, I'll not rest until I have given you back your daughters.

Oedipus: Bless you, Theseus, for your honourable care of us.

Chorus: I long to be where warriors thrill to the sound of ringing brass

Or the torch-strewn strand where the Pythian Ones attend their honoured mass;

Their acolytes' tongues are rendered mute by their songstress' golden key.

There Theseus and those maids will surely reunited be.

Past Oita they may reach the snowy mountain's western flanks,

On chariots perchance, or borne by rapid horses' shanks

They WILL be caught, and terrible is the approaching battler-clash;

Terrible too the vengeance of our king. The bridles flash,

The cavalry push onward, pledged to Athens and to one

Who guards her very borders, holy Rhea's dearest son.

Yet do they move? Or do they wait? No matter, I foresee

That those poor maids who suffered so shall shortly be set free,

Free of their siblings. Mighty Zeus will triumph and prevail,

And great shall be the struggle that will aid their sad travail.

O would that I could be a tempest-borne and swift-winged dove

To penetrate the clouds and watch the contest from above.

God of gods, all-seeing Zeus! Athena, here abide!

Give victory to these hunters as they comb the countryside!  
Apollo, Artemis, who hunt the fleet and dappled deer,  
Unite with Athens and her folk and free them all from fear.

Wanderer, you will not say I was a false prophet. Here come the girls now.

Oedipus: Where, where? What do you mean by these words?

Antigone: Father, father! What god will grant you your eyes that you may see the paragon who has returned us to you?

Oedipus: Child? Are you here? Antigone: Yes, Theseus and his loyal companions have brought us.

Oedipus: Come to your father, child. Let me satisfy myself that you are truly here. I never expected your return.

Antigone: I obey you – here I am. Your joy harmonizes with my desire to embrace you.

Oedipus: Where are you? Where? Antigone: Here we are.

Oedipus: Dearest children! Antigone: And dearest father!

Oedipus: My staff, my rock. Antigone: The hardships we've shared!

Oedipus: Greetings, my darlings. No longer am I destined to die in wretchedness with you by my side. Hold me, child, adhere to you dear father. No more wandering for you, no longer the outcast. Brief as you can, tell me the news – a short tale will do for someone so young.

Antigone: Here is our saviour. Let HIM speak, father. He will be succinct.

Oedipus: Friends, I beg you, don't wonder at my extended chat with two daughters I never expected to see again. My pleasure at their return, I know, derives from you alone. YOU rescued them, no-one else. The gods bless you and your land! In you alone I see piety, decency, truthfulness. So with these words I repay you. Give me your right hand, lord, that I may touch it. May I kiss your hand too? But what am I saying? How can a wretch such as I deign to touch a man without blemish? I must not, and I won't. Only those who have suffered my fate can accompany me in my misery. Receive my greeting from where you stand. Continue to treat me with justice, I pray.

Theseus: No wonder that you should speak at length in your joy at your children's return! None either that your first words should be to them, not me. These things do not concern me. We strive to illuminate our lives with deeds, not words. I'll prove it: revered sir, my oaths to you were not lies. Here I have recovered your daughters, alive and unaffected by the threats made against them. Why boast of a battle won when you will find out the facts from them? But there is one thing I heard on my way back that I'd like your opinion on. It's a small thing but significant. One must take no event lightly.

Oedipus: What is it, son of Aegeus? Tell me; I am ignorant of what you have learned.

Theseus: They say a kinsman of yours, though not a fellow-citizen, has prostrated himself before Poseidon's altar, where I was conducting rites before I left to come here.

Oedipus: Where is he from? Why is he a suppliant there?

Theseus: I know only this – he craves just a few words with you, they say, no more.

Oedipus: What does he want? A sanctuary is no place for few words.

Theseus: They say he wishes to speak with you and to receive safe conduct home again.

Oedipus: Who would be here as a suppliant?

Theseus: Do you have a kinsman in Argos who might make such a request?

Oedipus: Dear friend, enough! Theseus: What?

Oedipus: Ask me no more questions! Theseus: About what?



Oedipus: Now I know who this suppliant is.

Theseus: Who? Would I have cause to cross swords with him?

Oedipus: My own son, lord. And what he has to say would pain me more than anything else.

Theseus: What is that? Can you not hear him and refuse his request? What could be so painful to your ears?

Oedipus: Lord, they will be hateful words for a father to hear. Don't force me to yield to him!

Theseus: But think about his suppliant rights. Consider divine providence.

Antigone: Father, listen to me, young though I am to give you advice. Let this man do what he wants, thus satisfying himself as well as the god. Let us see our brother. Have comfort – anything he says which does not advance your cause will never wrench you from your purpose. What harm is there in listening? Evil deeds betray themselves in words. You are his father – you must not retaliate against him, even though he has foully wronged you. Let him alone. Other men have impious children and their anger at them is keen, but friends may chivvy them out of their natural instinct to chastise. Consider THEM, not the troubles you have had because of your own parents – THEN you will see how great anger may be appeased. You have no small reason for enmity, deprived as you are of your sight. But bear with me. Obstinacy does not become those who seek justice but you who have been treated well do not seem to know how to reciprocate good with good.

Oedipus: Child, you have won me over, though your words are both pleasure and pain, Have your will. But if he is to come into our presence, sir, protect me from harm.

Theseus: Revered sir, no need to repeat your request. But I must not boast. Consider yourself safe as long as a god protects me too.

Chorus: To abandon moderation and hold out for greater bliss

Is clearly only foolishness. For what I've found is this:

Long life brings pain, not pleasure, and the benefits of age

Are few. Life's pageant, at the end, finds Death lurking off-stage.

He comes to all, no fanfare, bringing grief, no more, no less.

All reason is transcended by the fact of nothingness.

Once in this world, 'twere best retrace our steps without delay.

What anguish can be shunned once heedless youth has had its day?

What grief is absent? Quarrel, bloodshed, discord, envy, strife,

Then last of all, old age, abhorrent terminus of life.

Reclusive, friendless, impotent, in which all griefs reside.

This man, like some storm-battered rock, a victim of the tide,

Is constantly assaulted by a plethora of ills,

From east, from west, from south and from the north's Rhipaian hills.

Antigone: I think the stranger is approaching...

Oedipus: Who is he? Antigone: We were right – it's Polyneikes. Father, he is alone and weeping copious tears.

Polyneikes: God, what am I to do? Sisters, am I to weep for my past misfortunes or those of my aged father here? Here I find him with you, on foreign soil, exiled, in rags, whose filth, old like him, clings crushingly to his body. Shaggy hair blows about his eyeless face. Wretched and mean, too, are the victuals he carries. All this, to my shame, I

recognize all too late. I was of no use to you, I was no support at all, I confess. THAT you may learn of me and no-one else. But forgiveness in all things shares Zeus' throne. Let it dwell also in you, father. There is remedy for my sins, for I will not add to them. Why are you silent? Say something, father. Don't turn away. No reply? Will you disdain me? Send me back without a word? Not give vent to your anger? My father's daughters, my sisters, try to move him to speak – he is hostile, unapproachable! I am a suppliant – don't let him dismiss me in utter silence.

Antigone: Poor wretch, tell him yourself what it is you want. Let the words spill out, pleasing or rousing indignation, or pity. Give words to the mute.

Polyneikes: I shall. You tutor me well. I claim the succour of the god, from whose altars the ruler of this land sent me with license to converse with this man under safe conduct.

Strangers, I require dialogue with my sisters and my father.

Let me tell you why I have come. I am an exile from my native land. Why? Because I demanded the right to sit on the throne that was once yours, being the elder son. Yes, Eteokles, my younger brother, banished me for this. He did this through neither a debate nor a show of physical strength – no, he won over the city. Your guilt, I say, is largely responsible for this – prophets have said the same thing. For when I came to Doric Argos and took Adrastus as my father-in-law, I chose my confederates from the leaders of Apia and her choicest warriors, that I might levy seven platoons against Thebes and either die in all justice or myself exile those who exiled me.

So...why am I here now? As a suppliant, father, I beg your aid. I have my allies placed in seven divisions and seven troops of spear around Thebes' plain. There is warlike Amphiaraus, prime spearman and augur, second, Tydeus of Aetolia, son of Oineus, third, Eteoklos, an Argive; fourth, Hippomedon, recruited by his father Talaos; fifth, Kapaneus, who swears he will torch the city of Thebes; sixth, Parthenopaios of Arcadia, named after the erstwhile virgin who later became his mother, Atalanta's splendid son; and myself, your own, or, if not, then born of an evil destiny, though called yours. I lead the fearless army of Argos against Thebes.

Father, in the name of your daughters here and of your own life, we all entreat you to cease your heavy wrath against me as I prepare to avenge myself on the brother who has exiled me, robbed me of my homeland. If we may believe in oracles, they say that might resides in those with whom you ally yourself. By our native springs and household gods. I entreat you to listen to me and support my actions. We are beggars in a strange land – you too are an alien here. We both serve others, we both worship the same gods. But the tyrant in our home gives himself airs and publicly scoffs at us. If you side with us, I'll scupper him in no time. I'll kick him out and set us two up in his place. With you on our side this will be my boast; without you I am lost.

Chorus: Oedipus, for the sake of the man who sent him to us, speak to this man before you send him back.

Oedipus: Gentlemen, if Theseus, the district-chief here, had not sent him to hear me speak, he would never have heard me speak a word. But now I shall reward him with words which can never be a comfort to him. You blackguard, when you wielded the power in Thebes that your brother now wields, you banished your own father, rendering him stateless, reduced to the rags you now weep to witness – now you are reduced to the same circumstances! No point in weeping! But this is my lot until my dying day, thanks to your villainy. You reduced me to this, you deported me, and now I roam about begging

others for my daily bread. If I had not fathered two girls to support me, I could have died – for all you cared! But they keep me going, these ministers. They are men in their capacity for hardships, not women. You were fathered by a stranger, not by me. If these divisions are set against Thebes, the gods do not favour you now. You cannot take that city – no, you will drown in your own blood, your brother too. I cursed you before, I curse you again, and I call upon my allies, that you may see that one must respect one's father, not reject him, blind though he may be. These girls are not like you. They override your suppliancy, your power, if Justice still exists and shares Zeus' ancient laws.

Leave, you detestable, fatherless cur (I'll not acknowledge you), and take with you these prayers – may you never take by the sword your native land, never return to valleyed Argos but die by a kinsman's hand and slaughter the man by whom you were exiled.

Those are my wishes, and I call upon gloomy Tartaros to banish you, I call upon these fair divinities, I call upon Ares who filled you with such abominable hatred. You heard me! Go! Tell all the sons of Kadmos and your own trusty companions that these are a father's blessings.

Chorus: Polyneikes, I take no pleasure in the deeds you have performed. Leave right now!

Polyneikes: So much for my journey here, the mustering of allies! Curse my ill luck! Such is the finale to my trip from Argos. I must tell this to none of them, I cannot turn them back, I must accept my fate in silence. Sisters, you heard a father's curses, for God's sake don't despise me should those curses be fulfilled and you achieve your home once again. No, lay me in a tomb and perform my funeral rites. The commendation you receive from your labours on this man's behalf will be no less when you do me this service.

Antigone: Polyneikes, please listen to me.

Polyneikes: Dearest Antigone, what do you wish to say?

Antigone: Take your army back to Argos without delay. Don't destroy yourself, don't destroy the city.

Polyneikes: That's not possible. To lead the army back would brand me with cowardice for all time.

Antigone: Don't get upset, brother! What advantage can you gain from the destruction of your homeland?

Polyneikes: Desertion is base. And I must not be mocked by a younger brother.

Antigone: But don't you see that your intentions will fulfill your father's prophecy?

Polyneikes: Yes, that's what he wants but we cannot accede.

Antigone: O God! Who will be anxious to do what he predicted?

Polyneikes: I will not tell them such nonsense! A good commander speaks encouragingly to his troops.

Antigone: Is that how you see it, brother?

Polyneikes: Yes, so don't try to stop me. This is the road I must take, harsh and ill-fated though my father and the Furies have shown it to be. Should you do as I ask, Zeus bless you both, for you can safeguard me only in death now, not life. Let me go! Goodbye! You will never see me again. Antigone: O God!

Polyneikes: Don't weep for me. Antigone: And who will weep for you when you accept the fate you predict, brother?

Polyneikes: I'll die if I must. Antigone: No, hear me.

Polyneikes: Don't advise me against what's right. Antigone: I'll be inconsolable without you.

Polyneikes: It is God who decides my fate. God grant you freedom from further care – you, least of all, deserve unhappiness.

Chorus: New trials throng us from this sightless man, both harsh and keen,  
Or Fate has intervened. Divine decrees have never been  
Pointless. And Time is constantly on guard for everything,  
And circumstances strain to reach their peak. Hear Heaven ring!

Oedipus: Children, children, can some citizen not bring noble Theseus here?

Antigone: Why do you demand this, father?

Oedipus: Winged Zeus' thunder presages my death. Bring him quickly.

Chorus: The mighty thundercrack of Zeus is crashing on my head,  
Unutterable. Seized with stark alarm, I crouch and dread.  
Again Zeus strikes. For what? I tremble – lightning won't appear  
Without some great occasion. O great Heaven! Zeus! I fear!

Oedipus: Children, here comes my God-ordained death. No turning back.

Antigone: How do you know? How do you come to this conclusion?

Oedipus: Oh, I KNOW! As quick as possible, someone fetch the ruler of this land.

Chorus: A piercing noise surrounds us now. Hark! Hark! O Lord, I pray,  
When casting gloom on Mother Earth, be merciful this day!  
Grant me this boon now that that reprobate has quit this place.  
Don't leave me profitless! Dispense to me your heavenly grace!

Oedipus: Has he come? Children, will he get here in time to see me still breathing, still in my right wits?

Antigone: What do you seek?

Oedipus: I want to fulfil my favour to him for his kindness. I promised.

Chorus: Come, prince, though now you loiter on Poseidon's rocky height,  
Performing in his hollow cave your sacrificial rite.  
The stranger wants to recompense us with a just reward  
For all the kindness we have done him. Hither, quickly, Lord!

Theseus: What is all this hubbub about? It emanates from the stranger as well as from my citizens. Is it Zeus' thunderbolt? Some devastating hailstorm? One may expect such things when a heavenly tempest rages!

Oedipus: Lord, you come on your cue. Happy fortune from heaven accompanies your arrival.

Theseus: Son of Laius, what new development is this?

Oedipus: My life is close to its end. But before I die I wish to fulfil my obligations. I will not lie to either you or your city.

Theseus: How do you know your end is near?

Oedipus: From the gods. They never give us a false sign.

Theseus: Tell us, old man, how this sign has been manifested?

Oedipus: Through Zeus' mighty thunder, which is always with us, and the missiles flashing from his deathless hand.

Theseus: You have won me. You are the father of many predictions, none false. Tell me what to do.

Oedipus: Aegeus' child, I'll tell you what will accrue to you, unembittered by time. I will now lead you (I need no guide) to the place where I must die. No-one must know the place, not in what region it is hidden. Thus it will always be a strength greater than a multiplicity of shields and allied swords. The holy mysteries which cannot be named, *you* shall learn when you come to the shrine alone. I may tell none of the citizens here, not my own children, even though I love them. Protect me always, and when I reach my life's end, tell the secret to just one whom you may choose, and who may pass it on to another, and so forth. Thus you will live – a city unpolluted by the Dragon's seed; countless are the cities which, however well governed, are quick to give offence. When a man loses his divine faith and turns mad, the gods know it well, though tardily. Let this not happen to you, Aegeus' child.

So I am telling you things you already know. Let us now proceed to the place, no shilly-shallying – God's ordinance moves me. Come with me, children. I lead *you* now, just as you once led me. Go. Don't touch me. Let me locate the holy tomb that the earth may swallow me and fulfil my destiny. That way, that way. Hermes the messenger and the goddess of the Underworld precede me. O lightless light, mine these many years, I touch you for the last time. At last I creep towards death, shortly to be an inhabitant of Hades. Dearest friend, use me kindly, you, your land, your attendants too. Prosper and remember me always.

Chorus: If I may to God Unseen and, Lord of Darkness, you,  
Then let him reach the Stygian land sans pain (Aidoneu!).  
From all the dreadful tribulations he has suffered through  
May Justice liberate him to be magnified anew.  
Goddesses of Hell, they say a staunch, unyielding brute  
Lies at your gates, dark Hades' guard, still snarling, never mute.  
Earth's child, I pray that Oedipus may have his passage blest  
To that far land. I call on you who give all endless rest.

Messenger: Gentlemen, I am here to give you, as briefly as I can, an account of Oedipus's demise. Yet a few words cannot suffice for what transpired nor for the import of his actions.

Chorus: The poor man is no more? Messenger: Hear how he departed this life.

Chorus: Did the poor wretch have divine intervention? Was it painless?

Messenger: It is a story worthy of wonder. He went, as you know, to the place he mentioned with no accompanying friend. Yes, he himself guided us all. When he came to the precipitous path which is firmly anchored with brazen ladders, he stopped at one of the interconnecting paths, near the hollowed vessel which houses the firm covenant of Theseus and Perithous. Then he stood midway between the Thorykian Rock and the hollow wild pear-tree, a little distance from the stone tomb. Then he sat down. He loosened his squalid garments. Then he called his daughters to him and bade them bring from the streams water to cleanse him, and a drink-offering to the dead from another source. In full view was purest Demeter's hill. In swift order they brought their father what he had asked for, then bathed and fed him in customary fashion. When all was done to his satisfaction, with none of his behests left undone, Zeus raised a rumbling noise beneath the earth, causing the maids to shake with fear. They flung themselves at his feet and wept, constantly beating their breasts and giving up endless cries. As soon as Oedipus heard these piercing sounds he folded them in his arms and said, "My children,

from this day forward your father will be no more. Yes, my life is at its end - no more will I endure the hardship of existence. I know my life has been hard, daughters, but one word alone will free me from all my suffering. Love! No man could love you more than I. Now I am to be wrested from you and you must live your lives without me.”

They embraced, all three, and wept copiously. When they finally ceased their lamentation, all was quiet. Suddenly a voice called out to him – it made our hair stand on end with fear. A god was calling him, over and over and on all sides: “Oedipus, why are we still waiting for you? Too long have you delayed.” When he realized he had been summoned by the god, he bade Lord Theseus approach him. And when he did, he said: “Dear friend, give me your hand in everlasting assurance that you will protect my daughters. Daughters, do likewise. Promise you’ll never betray them of your own accord, that you will attend to them with an open heart for all time.” And Theseus, like the noble man he is, vowed, with deep compassion, that he would do as he asked. This done, Oedipus laid his unseeing hands on his children and said: “Children, take courage! You must leave this place, and not take it as your right to see and hear what is forbidden by law. Leave at once. Only Lord Theseus may remain to witness my final act.”

We all heard him say this, and joined the maids in abundant lament. When we departed, turning quickly away, we observed the dead man from afar, and the king himself, who shaded his eyes with his hand as though at the appearance of some dreadful and insupportable terror. But then, almost at once, we saw him pay worship to earth and heaven with just one prayer. No mortal save Theseus alone may tell the manner of Oedipus’ death. In that moment no fiery thunderbolt took him from us, no sea-squall roused from the depths. No, it was some divine guide or else the foundations of the Underworld gaped open, dark yet cordial. No cause to mourn him – he was sent on his way without pain, a mortal worthy of admiration. If you consider my words lacking in sense, I make no excuse for them.

Chorus: Where are the maids? Where are your companions?

Messenger: The girls are close by. Their distinct cries of grief signify their approach.

Antigone: Alas! Now may we grieve the cursed blood of our house. For our father we suffered much hardship, and now in our grief we recognize the extent of what we have seen and felt.

Chorus: What has happened? Antigone: Friends, you can only surmise.

Chorus: He has gone? Antigone: In every way as you would have wished his going. He died neither in battle nor beneath the waves of the sea. No, the unseen shores of the Underworld snatched him up in an unseen fate. Darkness and destruction invades our poor eyes. How shall we scratch a meager living as we wander far-off lands or cross the depths of the sea?

Ismene: I cannot tell. Let deadly Hades kill me too that I may join my father – my future life is no life at all!

Chorus: Excellent daughters both, accept your fate with equanimity. You blaze with an excess of passion, for you have trodden a blameless path. Antigone: In some way I had a longing even for distress. What was far from pleasant yet WAS pleasant when we were together hand-in-hand. Father! Dear one! Clad now in the darkness of the earth! Though taken from us you will always have our love.

Chorus: He lived his life, Antigone: Indeed, and on his own terms.

Chorus: Which were? Antigone: He died on foreign soil, as he wished. He has eternal rest among the shadows of the Underworld. His sorrows are mourned here on earth. Father, my eyes are moist for you. I cannot dismiss such great pain. You wished for death in a foreign land, yet you died without me at your side.

Ismene: Poor girl, what fate still awaits you and me, orphaned as we are?

Chorus: Now that he has reached his blessed end, dear girls, cease your grief. No-one is beyond the reach of trouble.

Antigone: Dear girl, let us hurry back. Ismene: Why?

Antigone: I yearn to... Ismene: To what?

Antigone: ...to see home again.

Ismene: Whose home? Antigone: Our father's, God help me!

Ismene: How can that be right? You must see it's not permitted.

Antigone: How can you burden me with this?

Ismene: I can for... Antigone: Again?

Ismene: He died tombless, and alone.

Antigone: Take me there! Then kill me!

Ismene: With you gone, poor wretch, how shall I survive, desolate, helpless?

Chorus: Friends, you need have no fear. Antigone: But whither am I to flee?

Chorus: You have fled already. Antigone: What?

Chorus: To a place where you may end your life without ill.

Antigone: I know. Chorus: Then what is on your mind?

Antigone: We cannot go home.

Chorus: Don't try!

Antigone: Hell is there! Chorus: And has been in earlier times.

Antigone: My hands were tied then – now it's even worse.

Chorus: It is a ponderous weight that burdens you.

Antigone: O, where are we to go, Zeus? What hopes have I now?

Theseus: Cease your grieving, children. One must not mourn those on whom eternal night has granted grace. That way lies retribution.

Antigone: Son of Aegeus, we beseech you...

Theseus: To do what?

Antigone: We wish to see our father's tomb.

Theseus: That is not permitted.

Antigone: How can you say that? You, the ruler of Athens!

Theseus: Children, Oedipus forbade me to go near the area and to tell anyone the location of his sacred resting-place. If I obeyed his behests, he said, I would rule an untroubled land. Horkos, Zeus' servant, who hears all, heard me swear a binding oath to this effect.

Antigone: If that is his will, so be it. But send us to ancient Thebes – let us try to save our brothers from the slaughter.

Theseus: This I will do, and all else which may benefit you and your father, Hades' new tenant. I must not fail you.

Chorus: No more grief! Divine confirmation has absolute rule.

